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ABSTRACT

Since the mid-1980s, the Tuscany (Italy) regional government, the University of Florence (adult education department), and the Commune of Castelfiorentino have participated in a joint project aimed at narrowing the ever-widening gap between different segments of the Castelfiorentino population with regard to education and culture. The project focuses on the role of the library and has created a local information system that includes a television program on educational, cultural, recreational, and sporting events; a local newspaper started by citizens; air time on the local radio network for discussing local problems and information sharing; and a telephone information service. To increase the number of places where people can find, read, and borrow books, satellite service points have been established at such sites as beauty salons, recreational and cultural centers, hospitals, supermarkets, and schools. In addition, the project has developed a model to address the lack of a public adult education system in Castelfiorentino. The model involves: (1) establishing a planning process that defines educational objectives and addresses resource availability, appropriate methods, and procedures; (2) defining the target clientele; and (3) addressing the scope of application and resources available for training activities. Program evaluation would require assessing skills acquired during training by comparing them with requirements for local socioeconomic development; assessing how well the public was prepared for and given access to new training opportunities; and assessing the degree to which students actively participate in organized community life. (LP)

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Chapter 8
ANSWERS TO EDUCATION PROBLEMS IN RURAL ITALY

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THE LIBRARY IN CASTELFIORENTINO: NO LONGER THE DOMAIN OF A PRIVILEGED FEW

Castelfiorentino is a town with a population of about 20,000 located in the heart of Tuscany, around 50 km from Florence, Pisa and Siena. The surrounding countryside is dotted by poultry, pig and sheep farms as well as some 40 vineyards. Several major industries, in particular clothing, shoes and furniture, thrive in this region, generating business for 600 firms. Tourism is also expanding.

Since the mid-1980s, the Tuscany regional government, the University of Florence (adult education department) and the Commune of Castelfiorentino participated in a joint project aimed at narrowing the ever-widening gap between different segments of the population with regard to education and culture, focusing on the role of the most important public infrastructure in Castelfiorentino, the library. The Tuscany regional government has redefined and broadened the role of the library in society, identified the conditions needed to increase access, and tried to determine how the present services could be adapted to meet new needs.

The University of Florence, for its part, has been interested in studying and implementing strategies that would enable libraries like the one in Castelfiorentino to modify and expand their clientele by attracting groups that are

unaccustomed to using these facilties, such as workers, young people, housewives, the elderly, and so forth.[1]

As for the Commune of Castelfiorentino, it has helped to focus these research activities on the educational needs of society and to devise ways of adapting its own cultural structures to satisfy a new type of clientele. The ultimate goal is to cope with a situation where 60% of the town's population has not completed elementary school.

One of the major initiatives of this joint project was a conference held in Castelfiorentino on education, culture and information. Participants were asked to consider an action plan entitled "The Library and the Public", where the library is the primary link in a local information system, playing a more active role in adult education. The conference focused on the measures that should be taken to effect future changes, and was designed to achieve two main objectives: first, to determine what organizational structures would enable the population of Castelfiorentino to meet their needs; and second, to identify which factors create effective organizational structures. When people play a more active role in the learning process, they assure that precedence will be given to their own needs rather than to those expressed by others.

Upgrading adults' education should not be the concern of libraries alone. The people themselves must want to learn and be informed, while other services must strive to modify existing attitudes and behaviour. It is only then that we will see an increase in the number of adults enrolled in night school to earn a secondary school leaving certificate, and libraries will be able to fulfil their function to the fullest.

The conference paved the way for future action by defining concrete measures that would enable the library of Castelfiorentino to respond to the educational needs of the population as a whole, and highlighted the crucial role played by education in ensuring that adults lead a full, meaningful life.

The Action Plan

"Public" libraries are usually the "private" domain of students and the well-educated. Improved access to information in private, working and social life has produced more opportunities for reading and fostered the use of books, newspapers, radio and television.

It was important to adopt an organized participatory approach to bring about changes in adult education, to promote the social role of cultural structures and to identify the kind of information people needed.

Although the average level of schooling in Italian society has improved, it has not kept pace with developments in science and communication. Consequently, people are increasingly out of touch with the various channels of information and more and more passive with regard to the mass media, and our already low levels of instruction have fallen even further behind those of other European

countries we like to consider our equals. Most people who lack education take their situation personally and experience feelings of "psychological submission" and "social subordination".[2]

Population is not a homogeneous entity and to explore the possibility of establishing a relationship between people and books we have to divide the population into several different categories. The simplistic, two-fold classification, i.e. those who read and those who do not read, is totally inadequate, since it holds people solely responsible for the frequency with which they read.[3] We have to face the fact that cultural resources are **unequally distributed** in Italy. By acknowledging this reality, we will better understand the conditions which promote or preclude public participation.

Dictionaries often define the library as a "place where books are kept." Readers are not taken into account. Tullio De Mauro has proposed another definition, that is, a "place where books are lent or consulted." Once again, however, the emphasis is placed on the building or room where the books themselves are stored; the readers' needs are secondary. Readers are conspicuously absent from the history of Italian libraries, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the notion that people do not have to read. This attitude has had a harmful effect on the lower classes of Italian society. The government has not created an efficient public library system, but an "Italian" system where people have not been encouraged to read and where public libraries have become the "private" domain of a privileged few.

To date, librarians have studied the needs of those who already use libraries, but have not considered those who never set foot in these institutions. Nor have they considered the paradox that those most in need of information usually ask for less, while those who are least in need, ask for more and obtain more. The public library is a product of educational policies. As in Anglo-Saxon countries, it is extremely important that people view their library as a repository of written knowledge that belongs to all citizens. The absence of a broad-based ideology where the community identifies with its library explains the absence of ordinary citizens in the library's clientele historically.[4]

Libraries play an essential role in the process set in motion the moment books are written for they are responsible for distributing these works to the public. Instead of waiting for "customers" to arrive, shouldn't they seek them out and try to understand what they need? And if, as De Sanctis and Federighi have written,[5] learning to read is not merely a spontaneous phenomenon of childhood and adolescence but the result of real opportunities provided by a person's family and social background, shouldn't public libraries join forces with other political and social structures to eliminate the discrepancies that prevent many people from entering libraries?

The ideal library can preserve a collection of books, contribute to the intellectual development of all people, and ensure book distribution according to needs. Also important, is the encouragement of self expression through written culture and the transmission of this to those acting as receivers and spectators.[6]

Implementation of the Action Plan

Our first task was to pave the way for the proposed changes by studying the sociological make-up of the population of Castelfiorentino, their reading habits, education, and cultural situation. New library services were then introduced.

Creation of a Local Information System

The following steps have been taken to set up a local information system in Castelfiorentino:

- Space has been acquired at the local radio and television station and placed at the disposal of thetown's various associations.
- Permission has been obtained to broadcast a program on educational, cultural, recreational and sporting events.
- Citizens have started up a local newspaper. Introductory journalism courses and training sessions are offered to the general public.
- Air time has been granted by the local radio network for discussing local problems and providing information on the action plan *The Library and the Public*.
- A telephone information service has been set up and air time granted by the local television network.

In addition, the Italian pensioners' trade union helped to set up a telephone information service on work and health in the library. People can phone in to ask questions, make suggestions, and lodge complaints about municipal services, such as health care. Answers are given during a program broadcast on the local television network: *Dalla parte del cittadino* (The People's Point of View).

Satellite Service Points

We have not only studied and implemented ways of responding more effectively to the real needs of the library's new clientele but also increased the number of places where people can find, read and borrow books. This has involved setting up a number of satellite service points, with the town library serving as the main outlet making it possible to bring books to those living outside the downtown core or who are less likely to use the public library because of their social situation. The system could not have been implemented without the help of university students and cultural operators.

In Beauty Salons

The owners of certain beauty salons in Castelfiorentino received information on the library's action plan as well as training on how to present books and magazines to their customers. It is extremely important to clearly explain the purpose of satellite service points to the owners since this enables them to more effectively fulfil their role as "intermediaries" between the library and the public. When setting up the system in a beauty parlour, it is important to select a clearly visible and accessible place for displaying the reading material, to arouse the customer's curiosity.

Beauty salons were chosen in the downtown area, the suburbs, and the outskirts of the town. A total of 16 are now involved in the project, receiving some 30 to 50 books every 30 to 40 days. Salon owners are constantly urged to assure that their books are properly displayed, to compile a data bank, to gather criticisms and suggestions and, above all, to make more of an effort to shape customer preferences, since they are the ones who transmit information from one customer to another.

In Recreational and Cultural Centres

Setting up satellite service points where people can borrow books were chosen for this purpose since they serve as meeting places for the inhabitants of Castelfiorentino's suburbs, namely, Cambiano, Castelnuovo d'Elsa and Petrazzi. The opening of these service points has been anxiously awaited by many people, most of whom have never set foot in the town library. They now have access on a daily basis to books dealing with a wide range of popular subjects.

A continuous supply of books is renewed regularly to respond to specific requests or ensure sufficient variety. It is mainly men who use these facilities, although women, mostly housewives or homeworkers, also visit them. to pursue specific interests or look for answers to everyday problems. Many users specify that reading is not one of their hobbies and that they are merely looking for a specific piece of information. The ultimate challenge is to persuade people to read, to discuss and to be more critical in their appraisal.

The comments made by a pensioner are very significant in this regard. In his opinion, the library has brought to Castelnuovo, one of the suburbs of Castelfiorentino, the only form of culture the population can ever have. He thanked the service point for providing him with reading material, saying that people can never know enough in life, that knowledge is everything.

In Hospitals

Satellite service points set up in hospitals offer people with physical or

psychological problems an opportunity to read and thus make better use of their time by developing interests they often ignore in daily life. We also hoped to prevent the other service points established during the project from being perceived as "self-service" centres catering only to the healthy, a situation that would have perpetuated the kind of discrepancies of our present multi-tiered society. The relationship between users and service point operators is crucial, helping users to understand that reading is essential to satisfying their cultural needs and pursuing their everyday interests.

In the UNICOOP Supermarket

As agreed by the members of this consumers' cooperative, customers may borrow books exploring a wide range of subjects as well as other material dealing with problems discussed by INFOCOOP, a touch-sensitive display system providing information on food, diet, etc. A section of the store, known as the Ecological Isle, is also used for providing customers with information on environmental issues and inviting them to make use of a selective, waste disposal system for paper, glass, cans, batteries, medicine, clothing, plastics, and so forth.

In Schools

An analysis of the relationship between reading and the media provided the point of departure for this part of the project. Our objective was to show how the public library could be an effective tool for demonstrating that language and images cannot be dissociated from one another, for encouraging people to study the questions raised by images in greater depth, and to provide a better understanding of the messages relayed by the media since books usually analyze these questions in more detail.

Prior to setting up service points in schools, students' parents were surveyed through questionnaires, meetings and guided tours to identify problems that might have an impact on their children's education both in and out of school. The goal was to bring our project to the attention of a wider audience and to help parents realize that reading is not a sporadic or boring activity restricted to personal or school libraries and finally, that the public library offers services geared to the needs of everyone.

The students are now making full use of the service points and many adults and parents are now visiting a public reading facility, for the first time in their life. Some are even playing a role in managing the outlets.

Other Service Points

Other more "traditional" measures have been taken to promote the new image of Castelfiorentino's public library. For example, satellite service points where people can read and borrow books have been set up in parks, the favourite meeting place of elderly people. In addition, the standard practice of interrupting library service during the summer has been abandoned because many people stay in town. The library's opening hours have a direct impact on the effectiveness of its services. A "book-at-home" program offers the elderly or those having difficulty getting around, even if only temporarily, the opportunity to order books from the library by telephone.

Over the past few years, we have worked to establish a new kind of public library, similar to that defined by Filippo De Sanctis shortly before his death. We continue to pursue this objective. De Sanctis described the public library as the cultural and educational heritage of all people and specified that it should contribute to the intellectual development of the population as a whole by offering coherent, regular services; helping people to overcome difficult situations by assuring they have access to books and other reading material; promoting communication through written culture; and ensuring the preservation of books, which are the universal heritage of civilization and the historic memory of mankind.

BASIC APPROACHES

One of the crucial problems in Italy is the lack of a public adult education system. Over the years a broad consensus has emerged on the need to establish such a system. One of the objectives of the Castelfiorentino project is to make the educational tools available to a large public, and to ensure consistency through administration at the local level. This administrative function is fulfilled by the communes which, in conjunction with the associations, determine the educational and cultural environment of local communities. This tendency to establish local systems is especially strong in rural areas, in part because of the need to use all accessible resources and to make all existing resources available to everyone.

Strategic Hypotheses

This project examines the approaches used to solve current problems. It has a utopian aspect to it, with the possibility of immediately putting in place a framework that can regulate the entire education system and overcome existing differences between various educational and cultural systems and between

locations where educational activities are conducted and those where they are not. Such a system has the potential to be directed and controlled by the very public for which it is designed.

The reasons for adopting this approach are not purely idealistic, however. Italy's educational and cultural system cannot be transformed by half-measures, only a global approach can yield solutions to today's problems. The problems of adult education, library development, local economic development and so on cannot be addressed separately. This hypothesis of reorganization of the education system, serving as a starting point, does not specifically entail the establishment of networks, co-ordination mechanisms or "bridges" between the various sectors. The elimination of barriers between different stages in life and between various infrastructures and institutions constitutes an objective, but not a unifying end, serving as a landmark on the road toward a new educational environment.

Instead, the key to this approach may lie in increasing the current capacity of the public to adapt to the transformation of the local education system, the pace of which will be determined by the public itself.

A second working hypothesis, which is based on other projects in Italy, deals with involving younger students in the development of adult education, especially in rural areas, because of the lack of resources and infrastructures. This hypothesis is based on the possibility of developing socially productive school curricula for solving societal problems with relevancy. Acquiring and using scientific tools can yield immediate opportunities for assessing, validating or invalidating the objectives, methods and tools selected. This is thus a working hypothesis, which sees young people not as part of the problem, but rather as a resource for changing education conditions.

The third hypothesis deals with making cultural institutions accessible to the entire population. Libraries are a good illustration of the situation in rural areas, where they are often the only cultural institutions. Problems with their operation are much more serious in areas where the population is scattered throughout numerous small villages and there is a lack of practical means of communication, funding for culture is limited, and there are no cultural and library networks that have even the potential of meeting the population's reading requirements.

Innovative ways must be found of distributing cultural products (such as books), so that the large number of people who currently do not frequent cultural institutions can benefit. A critical analysis must be made to eliminate the factors which limit book distribution and prevent these institutions from truly serving the public.

Measures

The principal measures that characterize the success of projects such as the

one in Castelfiorentino typically fall into one of the following categories:

- contextual measures, making it possible and feasible to intervene in the area of adult education and which determine the outcomes;
- measures that ensure the operation and implementation of the education system;
- development measures, which seek to foster conditions allowing for a permanent place for adults in the various branches of the educational and cultural system.

Contextual Measures

Contextual measures, which determine the direction, content and feasibility of educational intervention, fall into one of the following three categories:

1. The planning process, which defines the objectives of educational and cultural programs; the available resources, the methods to use, the action to be taken and the procedures to follow.

Planning is an essential stage in adult education (we are referring here to local policies on adult education, and not to didactic planning) where decisive choices are made. Because this is a relatively new field, this task is often assigned to technocrats. For example, here are some of the crucial choices that must be made and the action that must be taken include determining

- the target clientele and the type of problems that need to be solved;
- the educational objectives to be achieved;
- division of responsibilities among the different institutions and parties involved (associations, businesses, unions, communes and so on);
- the extent of the resources available and what action is feasible;
- the preliminary elements (locations, players and so on);
- what methods are feasible (in light of the required resources);
- how the project should be managed and the role of the various local educational bodies.

2. The definition of the subject of the education program, meaning the clientele on whose behalf the interventions are made.

Using specific measures to define the target clientele makes it possible to define the training objectives of the educational and cultural activities more effectively. It should be stressed that no activities have universal application, and that the methods and structure selected determine the target clientele. For example, deciding to focus on workers in a given production sector would have obvious consequences for activity planning. In addition, defining the target clientele makes possible the determination of conditions under which they will participate and, eventually define and plan measures to make education more accessible, in conjunction with cultural institutions, schools, busi-

nesses and so on.

Defining the primary subject of the education program makes possible public organization and management mechanisms to implement forms of "educational negotiation" at the individual and group level, so that the public can participate directly in the management of activities.

3. The scope of application and the resources available for training activities. These measures involve:

- First, the scope of the planned educational project. Specifically, this refers to the links to be established between the workplace and the educational institutions (not through practice, but rather through research projects, for example) and among the various cultural institutions involved in the project (ranging from databanks to museums). After all, is it possible to acquire real information without databanks, libraries and museums, and without arts-oriented educational activities, which are so important in an economic context in which the arts and tourism sectors play such a large role?

This also refers to the use of basic services in support of the interventions, in particular the following services, indispensable to the Italian project: public information; assistance and orientation; academic initiation; training and research for teachers; documentation;

- second, planning the labour-market entry of each participant in the education project and ensuring that these persons become real clients of the local education system. This point will be examined in greater detail later on.

Implementation of Activities

To understand the effects that a systematic approach can have on activities and helping participants, it is useful to examine the basic stages of implementation that include the pre-course stage consisting of public information and orientation activities and having the participants adopt the role of subject of the project. A social incentive to education is reflected in the measures to make education opportunities more accessible to workers and small business people; to involve local organizations and leaders in the public information process and to develop future education opportunities; and tailoring of activities and programs to the participants' needs and skills. Educational practices based essentially on the teacher/student relationship result only from an approach that is devoid of context and does not make use of local resources. This approach, seeks to situate education within the context of individual learning problems, lack of skills in the local economy; and participants' opportunities for educational and occupational activities dictates that the educational environment extend well beyond the walls of the classrooms or workshops of the educational institution or vocational training centre. It requires that education be linked to ongoing social and economic changes and be based on research methods rather than top-down, non-interactive communication techniques.

Development Measures

The social demand for a basic education involves more than just obtaining a diploma. While a diploma is certainly a legitimate goal, it cannot provide sufficient motivation for completing studies at this level.

The demand for training must be seen as an attempt to reintegrate the educational and cultural system on a permanent basis. Otherwise, the individual and public investment in time and money would be wasted. We feel that action is required in the following three areas:

1. assessing the skills acquired during training by comparing them with the requirements for local socio-economic development. Developing assessment tools to identify training problems faced by participants who have completed courses and informal educational activities would prove invaluable for replanning and restructuring the project and would have tremendous advantages for all concerned;

2. preparing the public, to give them access to new training opportunities (not only by adapting existing eligibility requirements, but also by adapting local infrastructures to the educational requirements of the new clientele). This refers to various educational and cultural institutions in cities and, for secondary school graduates, to universities;

3. making students accountable for participation in organized community life. This aspect is often neglected in the course follow-up stage, but for both strategic and practical reasons, developing abilities and opportunities for participating in organized community life is often the key to preparing people for management, teamwork and innovation. To mention only one of the many functions of such participation, one might ask who is better positioned and has more flexibility to meet urgent needs for information than associations? Who should be given the responsibility of anticipating institutional responses?

Public Organization & Development of Adult Education Research

Although the working hypotheses focus on the future and how to implement potential projects, the model that is best suited to meet the objectives and yield the desired results is one which examines and creates a virtual future. The basic methods thus consist of research. However, methods that make research a sequential process, by separating "before" (the research) from "after" (the transformation, which is generally not a logical result), are not productive. "After", meaning the changes that one wants to bring about and the desire to make those changes, also determines "before", meaning the research methods that are used. The processes of stagnation or development of the subject matter have already begun, evolving negatively or positively, in response to the action or inaction of the parties involved. For this reason, at all levels of our work, the key to success lies in the ability of the education system's new clientele to

recognize the power it has to control and direct these processes.

Enlightened minds often plan "stellar" projects that nevertheless turn out to be "astronomical" flops. Research must therefore always be grounded in educational realities, and designed to give the end users of projects the conscious ability to control and change the educational process. The issue is thus one of organizing scientifically the process of skill development and consolidation among the new clientele of the education system, in order to redefine collectively the system's objectives and relationships with workers, the unemployed, cultural institutions, governments and, ultimately, the realities of everyday life.

With this in mind, the methods used are designed to foster a social framework for the desire and need for change, and to provide solutions to institutional, financial, educational and other problems.

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